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GERMAN APPREHENSIONS IN NORWAY

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GERMAN APPREHENSIONS IN NORWAY

SUMMARY

A number of developments suggest that the German authorities are geminely concerned over Norway as a possible area for Allied military operations in the second half of 1942. Similarly the Norwegian Nazis under Quisling appear to be more disturbed than usual. German-Swedish relations reflect a similar uneasiness.

The German strategists may have reason to be concerned when they contemplate the various advantages that successful action in Norway would bring to the cause of the Allies, and when they consider some of the recent political moves concerning Finland and Norway.

Any contemplated Allied action in Norway must count on the Germans being well prepared to meet it in the season just ahead.

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The German strategists naturally seek as best they can to forecast where the proposed second front will be attempted. That the Nazi high command considers the coast of Norway one of the serious possibilities is suggested by a succession of developments in recent weeks.

I. Moves by the German authorities

A. There has been an intensified German concern with defense problems in western and northern Norway. This has been manifest in several ways:

a. The holding of extensive anti-invasion manoeuvres the last week of July in the Kristiansund-Trondheim area. Severe prohibitions against civilian traffic and fishing in the area continued beyond the manoeuvres proper.

b. Women Hird members have been commissioned to establish large camp kitchens at various places--a move which leads some neutral circles to believe the Germans anticipate war operations in Norway in the near future.[1]

c. There is an intensified concern over the rapidly growing naval base at Tromsö, which is on the way to become a veritable fortress. In mid-July the German authorities offered a reward of 500 kroner to any one

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1. Telegram, #2018, August 3, 1942

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who found and reported any British mine in the area (British mine layers had been increasingly active in this region). The Germans then laid mines very extensively in the waters covering the approaches to Tromsö and on August 4 sternly warned fishermen to stay out of the waters in question.

d. The increased diversion of forced labor to coastal fortifications[1]. Compulsory labor service in Norway was extended sharply in July and it was planned to increase an aggregate of 20,000 laborers to 50,000.[2] The idea of sending any appreciable number to Germany was dismissed in favor of putting them to work on Norwegian coastal fortifications. Workers recruited in Oslo have been sent to the Trondheim area, and laborers from Bodö have been sent to work on fortifications in Finmark.[3]

But labor is proving recalcitrant. Through underground channels Norwegian labor groups have circularized their workers urging them to refuse labor on fortifications.[4] In Northern Norway there has been trouble among the conscripted workers, because of strikes, mass demonstrations and mass arrests ("several hundred" strikers in the Lofoten area are reported turned over to the Gestapo).[5] That these disturbances "in recent days" have

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1. The New York Times, August 4, 1942.
2. Telegram #5396, July 24, 1942.
3. Norsk Radiopresse, July 23, 1942/
4. Ukens Nytt fra Norge, August 8, 1942, p. 10.
5. The New York Times, August 6, 1942.

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brought a considerable slowing down of work on the fortifications can hardly be assuring to German authorities at this particular time.

e. A nation-wide registration of motor boats has been ordered. This is aimed first to reduce the chances of flight to England. Quite understandably too, it will reduce the opportunities for patriots to be of help to possible invaders. A new series of arrests in Western Norway not long ago included many individuals prominent in shipping circles. Terboven recently sought in vain to move the Norwegian shipowners to place their resources more directly under the jurisdiction of the German authorities.

B. Uneasiness of Norwegian Nazis.

There are signs that Quisling too, and his henchmen, are increasingly uneasy.

a. At the national celebration of St. Olaf's Day, July 29, Quisling warned his countrymen of bloody civil war if a second front is opened. Just a day or two later a newspaper at Skien, southwest of Oslo, returned to the theme. It warned its readers that in case of invasion Norway would be transformed into a second Spain. And in Spain, it recalled, victory lay with the Axis. That the Quisling authorities at this time should remind the Norwegians so pointedly of the dreaded second front, would indicate that their apprehensions about it are more than academic.

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b. Very disconcerting also is the boldness with which the country's leading churchmen took the momentous step late in July of severing the Lutheran Church of Norway from the state. They created a provisional church council to exercise the authority of the independent church. That the higher clergy should act with such boldness and extremism at this particular time may suggest to Quislingites that the churchmen will not be surprised to see even bigger developments soon.

C. Renewed German pressure on Sweden.

Sweden was sharply rebuked on July 29 by the Wilhelmstrasse for its neutrality policy. In particular the German spokesman objected to a column in the pro-Ally Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning which urged that if neutrality could not be observed, Sweden should take care to be found on "the right side." The next day seven Swedes--members of an industrial firm--were reported arrested in Poland.

Seen from the German standpoint, Sweden has been following too independent a policy. Over the Swedish radio, protests against German violations of Swedish neutrality by submarines and planes have been as vigorous as those against Russia for similar alleged offenses. In a speech on July 31, Premier Hansson warned that the Swedish people might demonstrate that they loved democracy and freedom even more than they loved peace and neutrality.

The Wilhelmstrasse warning of July 29 was very likely

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meant to serve more than one purpose. It may have been a warning to Sweden to yield something in the Swedish-German trade negotiations, or to induce a firmer tone toward Russia on the Baltic sinkings. But it may also have been intended to warn Sweden away from too pronounced a pro-Ally orientation, just when the Allies might be considering fresh operations in Norway.

II. Strategic considerations

The Nazi strategists, in their effort to forecast Allied moves, have certainly considered the points which might induce the Allies to try operations in Norway.

A. Norway cannot very well be the scene of that second front which is spoken of so universally at present, and which is intended to bring Germany's eventual defeat. But it may prove a good secondary front. That is, if a secondary front is needed for the remainder of 1942 to divert some Nazi forces and relieve the overwhelming pressure on the Don and Caucasus armies, Norway may offer certain advantages.

A secondary front should have a natural limit. That is, it should offer the prospect of a logical conclusion within a reasonable time. Norway offers such a prospect since it is not contiguous to Germany or with her occupied areas on the continent. A campaign begun in August, say, would, if accompanied with any success at all, have a good chance of being over before winter set in. Provided, that

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is, that Sweden remained neutral. And we cannot tell that the Nazi command has given up hope of keeping Sweden neutral in the event of an attack on Norway.

B. A campaign in Norway, as the Nazis well know, will be welcomed by a home front ready to add its effort to the common cause. This summer a common form of greeting in Norway is "August"--indicating a widespread opinion that this is the month that will see Allied military activity in Norway. A successful action in Norway would give subjected populations everywhere fresh courage to carry through another exhausting winter.

C. Allied control of the vital northern line of supply to Russia would be secured. The Nazi command knows full well that to eliminate the troublesome Nazi bases which threaten Allied convoys, the Allies might well find it worthwhile to institute an action confined, at present, only to Northern Norway.

D. A successful campaign in Norway would restrict considerably the freedom with which Germany now wages her submarine war in the Atlantic. Were Norway again in their possession, the Allies might find it relatively easy to close Germany's North Sea exit to the Atlantic, as they did more or less in 1914-18.

E. If conducted in force, and with a scrupulous regard for Swedish susceptibilities, an operation in Norway at this time--as the German strategists well know--might bring Sweden in on the Allied side. Finland too, now wavering in her course,

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might, if the United Nations can find the formula that will allay her worst fears of Russia, see fit to desert Germany. A sudden shortening of the Russian front where it threatens the Northern supply line and the pressure of new Allied air bases in Norway are prospects which the Nazi command would not relish on this eve of the fourth winter of war.

III. Political developments

Nazi strategists have reason to show increased concern over their defenses in Norway, because of some recent political developments.

A. The United States' termination of consular relations with Finland suggests a new firmness in exploiting the Northern supply route to Murmansk.

B. The Mutual-Aid agreement of July 11, 1942, between Norway and the United States provides among other things that "the Royal Norwegian Government will continue to contribute to the defense of the United States of America and the strengthening thereof, and will provide such articles, services, facilities or information as it may be in a position to supply." The German command can well understand that this clause might (though it does not necessarily do so) well look toward concrete action in a not too distant future.

C. The proposed reorientation in Norwegian foreign policy.

Various circles, Swedish especially, have been disturbed

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by the announcement--more in the nature of a trial balloon than a formal statement of policy--that Norway intends to desert the ideals of Northern solidarity, and, for the future, will seek her security in alliance with the Atlantic powers. If the Swedes are disturbed, then German strategists must certainly see unfavorable implications in it. Norway is in a position to offer her Atlantic friends heavy inducements to bring about a major action in her favor--air and naval bases, for example, along her strategically important coast.

CONCLUSION

Any Allied plans for operations in Norway in the second half of 1942 must take for granted that such operations will come as no surprise to the Nazis. They will be prepared accordingly. The number of occupation troops has been sharply increased.[1] The Nazis will not underestimate the importance of securing their hold on Norway so long as they have a front in Russia and so long as they are in a position to pursue the submarine war in the Atlantic.

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1. Though the estimate of 500,000 troops now in Norway is decidedly higher than any previous source has reported, and seems excessive. Telegram, July 24, 1942.